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ABSTRACT

This guidebook is part of a series of program materials for a school-based intervention process to help at-risk students stay in school. An introduction sets forth the responsibilities of the adminstrator/planner. The rest of the booklet contains suggestions for ways to carry out the administrator/planner role creatively and effectively. The following steps are described: perform a needs assessment, access the needed resources, form a dropout prevention task force, adopt or develop a program model, prepare a written agreement, allocate staff and resources, reorganize school structures, manage the program budget, provide inservice, encourage flexibility and creativity, evaluate the program, and review evaluation findings with the task force. (YLB)

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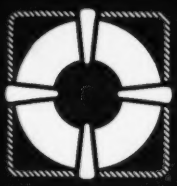

DROPOUT PREVENTION SERIES

The Helping Process Booklet for Administrators/Planners

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THE HELPING PROCESS BOOKLET FOR ADMINISTRATORS/ PLANNERS

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INTRODUCTION

NOTE TO ADMINISTRATORS/PLANNERS: Before you read this booklet, please be sure you have already read the *Helping Process Overview Guidebook*. The guidebook contains important information about the helping process that you will need to make the most of this booklet for yourself, your faculty and staff, and your at-risk students.

Working as a Helping Process Administrator/Planner

Few high school administrators can deny the obvious: the educational challenge of the decade is the spiraling dropout rate among our teenage students. Dropout-prone students, frustrated and failing in school, burden the educational system as it is currently structured:

- At-risk students often express their human needs and low self-esteem as negative behavior and increased demand for attention. This results in disproportionate use of teacher and administrative time and resources, which, even when offered, have little positive effect on either student behavior or academic achievement.

- The sheer number of at-risk students with sporadic attendance often requires additional administrative staff to monitor attendance patterns and ensure state departments of education that the school is attempting to comply with compulsory attendance laws. Such monitoring, however, has little effect on the absenteeism.

- High dropout rates compromise schools' credibility with their boards of education and communities, particularly as most dropouts stay in the area and plague the community at large with their behavioral, unemployment, and other dependency problems.

High school districts and individual high schools around the country have responded to these problems with a wide variety of dropout prevention programs. Some have had encouraging—even astonishing—success; others have not. **The helping process** series is based on the best practices drawn from the most effective programs across the nation. Regardless of what form your dropout prevention program may take, putting the helping process to work in the school(s) will help to ensure that your dropout-prone students receive not only the educational assistance they need to stay in school and earn a diploma, but the many and diverse kinds of noneducational support that individual students need to underpin their individual effort.

As an administrator/planner for a dropout prevention program, you will have a number of specific responsibilities to fulfill. Here are your basic responsibilities:

- **Determine the scope of the dropout problem** in your school(s) by performing a needs assessment.

- **Assess the resources that will be needed** to address your dropout problem effectively.

- **Form a dropout prevention task force** composed of business leaders, members of social service agencies, community leaders, key school system representatives, and other leaders from organizations whose cooperation will be needed to provide the critical resources for a comprehensive dropout prevention program.

- **Develop, with the task force, a comprehensive dropout prevention program model** (many models already exist that you may wish to adopt or adapt), as well as program objectives, student intake criteria, and short- and long-term evaluation procedures that will meet your school and community needs.

- **Complete a written agreement** among all involved parties for the allocation and administration of all necessary resources, specifying which parties have responsibility for which activities and prescribing specific procedures for referral, cooperation, and funding.

- **Allocate staff and resources** needed to make the program work in the school(s). This means developing an appropriate program administrative structure to operate in the school(s), choosing a program coordinator for each site, selecting any other appropriately qualified faculty and staff for the program, and making provision for other necessary resources.

- **Reorganize or redesign school structures,** policies, and curricula as appropriate. In particular, policies concerning discipline must be established with concern for the needs of at-risk students.

- **Develop and manage the program budget** for school, district, state, and community accountability.

- **Provide inservice** or other orientation for all faculty and staff that will be involved in the program (orientation may beneficially include staff and volunteers from resource organizations or the community whose efforts will be important in making the program work). This is the time to familiarize all involved adults with the basic helping process as well as the more general structure of your program model.

- **Encourage flexibility, creativity, and commitment** to the program among all involved persons and organizations, but particularly among school faculty and staff. Support these qualities by modeling them yourself and by providing appropriate recognition and reinforcement in others.

- **Evaluate the program** formatively (at frequent intervals to help refine and strengthen policies and practices) and summatively (at the end of each school year, including follow-up of program dropouts and completers, to provide data on program impact).

- **Review program evaluation findings with the task force** on at least an annual basis to refine, strengthen, and perhaps expand the model and alliances.

Besides these specific responsibilities, it is important for you to **experience the helping process personally.** That is, if you really want to do a good job as the program administrator/planner, you need to get in touch with the microlevel of your own dropout prevention model and develop a personal awareness of the problems and solutions that exist for the at-risk students, school faculty and staff, and other persons involved directly in making the program work.

Probably the best way to do this is to become a member of a helping process team for one of your at-risk students. As a team member, you may act as an educator, counselor, team coordinator, or perhaps mentor to the student. In interacting with the student and the other team members, you may find yourself called on to take other, nonspecific roles such as a mediator, advocate, broker, role model, enabler, advisor, or even friend to the student. *The Helping Process Overview Guidebook* and *The Helping Process Booklet for Team Members* contain information and helpful hints for filling these roles effectively.

The rest of this booklet contains suggestions for ways that you can carry out your administrator/planner role creatively and effectively.

CREATIVE WAYS TO CARRY OUT YOUR ADMINISTRATOR/PLANNER ROLE

Perform a Needs Assessment

The first step in developing a solution for any kind of problem is to assess the quality and extent of the problem itself. In this case, you need to (1) identify the students in your school(s) who are at risk of dropping out, and (2) determine what kinds of problems are contributing to these students' likelihood of dropping out. Only with this information in hand can you ensure that whatever solutions you develop will be adequate to the challenge.

Here are some suggestions for conducting an effective needs assessment of your school's dropout problem:

- **Decide your goal, from the beginning.** Will your dropout prevention program work with students in immediate danger of dropping out (e.g., currently in grades 10, 11, and 12), those in eventual danger of dropping out (e.g., currently in grades 7, 8, and 9), those who have already dropped out but are still under age 21, or some combination of these?

- **Develop a multifactor predictor of dropout risk** with which to identify students in your school who are probably in danger of dropping out. The factors should include combinations of at least some of the following:

  —Low academic achievement as measured by school grades and standardized achievement series results

  —Poor and/or erratic attendance patterns

  —Cultural identity outside of the mainstream American culture or that of the given school

—Dysfunctional family history

—Economically deprived conditions in the home

—Substance abuse (drugs or alcohol)

—Transient family residency patterns

—Multilingual backgrounds where English is not the primary language spoken in the home

—Patterns of physical and/or sexual abuse

—Adolescent pregnancy or students who already have dependent children

- **Decide where to get your data for your needs assessment.** That is, will you need to collect new data for your needs assessment or will existing data will be sufficient to give you the information you need? If your school or district already uses a reliable follow-up instrument, or if you have access to computer program output that identifies student withdrawals and their reasons for leaving early, then you may only need to analyze the data at hand.

- **Determine whether collection of any new data for your needs assessment ought to be formal or informal** in nature, as follows:

  —In a small school district or for a single school program, you may only need to meet informally with the principal(s), counselor(s), and teachers in the basic skills curricula to identify the probable at-risk students and gain a grasp of the range of problems (educational and noneducational) that a dropout prevention program will need to address.

  —In a larger or more diverse school or school district, you may need to draw formalized data to ensure that you can document the size of the dropout problem and the range of local factors contributing to it that will need to be addressed. A formal needs assessment may involve a survey of school instructors, students in school, their parents, youth who have already dropped out, or others, followed by careful data analysis.

- **Use your data analysis to develop a profile of dropout-prone students in your school(s),** detailing the factors that appear to be most critical in students' decision to leave school. This profile will serve as the framework for designing (or improving) your dropout prevention program. If appropriate, prepare a report on the scope of the dropout problem to your school superintendent, board of education, and/or the community.

Assess the Needed Resources

Once you've developed a profile of your at-risk students and the problems that contribute to their likelihood to drop out, you will need to match those problems to resources—in the school and in the community—that can provide workable solutions. These resources usually align with the four components of most effective dropout programs: (1) education, guidance, and other in-school elements; (2) public health and social services; (3) employment linkages; and (4) family and community support.

Here are some points to consider when trying to match problems to solutions:

- **Be aware that you may not be able to address (at least at first) the needs of some groups of dropouts or at-risk students,** or you may need to make special arrangements with outside groups to provide the necessary support. For example, pregnant teens have special medical and physical needs that are atypical of other dropout-prone students. Their 6-8 weeks of school absence also present educational concerns that are specialized and unique to them. Can you meet those needs?

- **Think about elements within the present school structure (staff, facilities, funding, and other resources) on which you can draw** to provide needed services or support to your targeted at-risk youth. Are there teachers who evidence an interest in a dropout prevention program? Do you have teachers with unusual skills in teaching and relating to students who have deficient skill and/or behavior patterns?

- **Determine what community resources or agencies might support a dropout prevention program.** Is there a readily available medical clinic to meet the physical needs of pregnant or chemically dependent students? Are there employers willing to make good part-time jobs available if students' needs suggest the inclusion of a work component built into the vocational or academic part of the program?

- **Assess the level of support you can count on from your board of education.** Given the proper data and a well-structured proposal, are they likely to approve and allocate funds for a dropout prevention program? What other programs are competing for board support and funding?

- **Be creative about finding additional financial support.** How much other funding (besides board of education support) are you likely to need? Might state or foundation funds be available? Will you need donations from business and industry of equipment, facilities, or the like?

All of these items reflect practical administrative considerations that have a bearing on whether you can get a program off the ground, which and how many students you'll be able to serve, and what organizations, agencies, employers, and individuals you'll need to involve in the program to make it work. You'll find more details on potential resources and approaches in *The Helping Process Overview Guidebook*. Many support services probably already exist in your school and community whose mission would include assistance to your at-risk students. Other services and support may have to be developed by you (e.g., attendance assistance, English-as-a-second language programs, scholarship incentives for school completers, and so forth).

The match of your at-risk students' needs and the related school and community resources and approaches form a profile of basic program services and support that your program will need to be effective.

Form a Dropout Prevention Task Force

With your needs assessment data and basic program service and support profile in hand, you are ready to approach and bring together the key upper-level school officials and leaders of public agencies and community organizations whose support you'll need to make a dropout prevention program work. These key persons will form your dropout prevention task force, a group whose primary functions are (1) to develop and refine a model, policies, and general procedures for the dropout prevention program; and (2) to cooperate and collaborate to offer the necessary services and support that your model will offer to help at-risk students stay and succeed in school.

Here are suggestions for forming an effective dropout prevention task force:

- Recruit first those community organizations or agencies whose mission naturally addresses problems relevant to your at-risk students' needs.

- Recruit some members from the school(s), including key faculty and/or staff who have expressed an interest in the program and whose influence will assist in other school personnels' interest and commitment to the program. Don't forget to include representatives from the middle schools; special efforts should be made to carry over remedial efforts to the high school and to have an extensive orientation to high school for at-risk middle school students.

- **Make clear to task force members the scope of the problem** and the expected effects of the dropout rates on the young people, the community, and the economy if those rates do not come down. Also make clear to the members that the dropout problem is not solely the responsibility of the schools, but of the schools and community together, and that it cannot be successfully addressed by one group or system alone.

- **Include as task force members only those persons from the community who have the authority to commit their groups' time and resources to the program.** Although it is often politically astute for other kinds of task forces or advisory committees to

include persons whose membership is primarily honorary, the amount of work and the depth of commitment needed from members of a dropout prevention task force are such that having noncontributing members is probably counterproductive.

- **Make clear to the members your expectations of them.** Set by mutual agreement the number of meetings they will need to attend (this number will be higher at the beginning, when you are developing the program, and will probably diminish to once every 6 months or a year once the program is up and running).

- **Act as the task force chairperson and ex officio representative of the school or school system.** You may wish at some future date to turn over the chair title and responsibilities to some other member, but you should make it your business to keep tabs of all task force activities and decisions and to attend all meetings or, if necessary, to send a qualified proxy in your place.

Adopt or Develop a Program Model

Together with your task force, you next need to consider the options for developing a model structure for your dropout prevention program. The model should provide resources and avenues to help solve the many kinds of educational and noneducational problems that contribute to your students' likelihood to drop out of school. Many successful models are already in operation around the country, and you may wish to adopt or adapt one of them. *The Helping Process Overview Guidebook* offers brief reviews of several excellent and proven program models.

Here are suggestions for developing or adapting a program model:

- **Start by developing overall program objectives** upon which you can base your design or selection of a model. For example, will your program seek to help only at-risk students still in school, or will it reach out into the community to try to attract recent dropouts back to classes to earn a G.E.D.? Students who have already dropped out may have a greater need for day care for dependents, flexible class schedules to allow for full- or part-time

employment, nontraditional curricula, and the like. At-risk students who are still in school may have more need for an alternative environment that emphasizes small class size, vocational training, attendance assistance, and strong parental involvement.

- **Draft criteria to be used for intake of at-risk students.** It's unlikely that you will be able to serve all youth who match some of the factors of at-risk students or dropouts. Your program intake personnel will need guidance on which students are most at-risk in order to handle referrals to the program. These criteria should include the number of students you expect the program to be able to handle per quarter, semester, or school year, as well as weighted characteristics or factors to help the intake personnel make decisions.

- **Develop both short- and long-term evaluation procedures for the program.** Short-term evaluation should be formative, in that it should provide frequent feedback on the progress of the program and how its various components and procedures are functioning to meet the program objectives. This feedback allows continual fine-tuning of the model to meet student needs. Long-term evaluation should be summative, giving periodic feedback (e.g., once a year) on the overall effectiveness of the model in retaining at-risk students and in improving program completers' success once they leave school. Summative evaluations can also point out major problems in the model by following up on students who drop out of the program and determining why it failed to keep them in school.

Prepare a Written Agreement

Draft an agreement to be signed by all of the organizations and agencies that will participate in the dropout prevention program. This agreement should list the objectives of the program, outline the model to be used, and make clear the roles and responsibilities of each participating group as well as any timelines appropriate to the delivery of services or support. Present the draft agreement to the task force for their modifications and approval.

When the agreement (which can take the form of a letter) meets everyone's approval, it should be signed by the authorized representatives of each participating group, usually the task force member or the CEO of the member organization. Both you and the highest possible official of your school or school system (e.g., superintendent of schools) should sign the agreement for the school(s). Each participating group should receive its own copy of the signed agreement. (Incidentally, the signing of the agreement can be publicized through the media to draw attention to the new program and help build grassroots support.)

In addition to the agreement, it is a good idea to prepare a **general procedural manual** to accompany the agreement. Such a manual should describe the need for the program, the program model, the program's philosophy and objectives, administrative structure of the program, interrelation-ships of participating groups, roles and responsibilities of participants at every level, overall policies, criteria and procedures for student intake, a brief overview of the helping process as it will be used in your program, and so forth.

A procedural manual of this sort will have many uses. It will serve as a reference manual for nonschool service providers, the program coordinator(s), involved faculty and staff, and other participants. It can also be used as a resource to share with state and local legislators, employers, the media, and other persons whose interest and support would benefit the program. Finally, it ensures the community that you have thought out the program in detail and backed its operation with carefully designed policies and practices intended to help students make the most of their educational opportunities.

As with the program agreement, you or your staff should prepare a draft of a procedural manual, submit it to the task force for modifications and approval, and make copies of the finalized manual available to all relevant participants.

Allocate Staff and Resources

Allocating appropriate staff and resources for the program is probably your single most crucial task. Clearly, you will need to delegate a great deal of responsibility for making the program work to people in the schools(s) who have good, close working relations with faculty and staff and are in touch with the realities affecting dropout-prone students.

Choosing the **program coordinator** for each school is of particular importance, because to make the program work, you must give this person the authority and responsibility to deal with the problems at his or her own school site autonomously (that is, in cooperation with other involved faculty and staff at the school, but with a large degree of autonomy from the rest of the school system). The qualities of a good coordinator include the following:

- Excellent "people skills"
- A commitment to helping young people overcome barriers to success
- Good organizational skills without a dependency on being bureaucratic
- The ability to mediate
- Knowledge of or willingness to learn about all collaborating external organizations and agencies
- Data collection and analysis abilities
- A history of being willing and able to "go the extra mile"

To help you grasp the scope of the program coordinator's responsibilities, here are the **tasks a program coordinator must do** to make a dropout prevention program work at his or her school or site:

- Introduce the program into the school setting.

- Generate enthusiasm and commitment among interested school faculty and staff, and provide information and inservice on the Helping Process to all involved adults (including volunteers and parents).

- Organize or reorganize courses and other education-related resources, with the participation of affected faculty and staff.

- Set up and maintain open lines of communication.

- Conduct or supervise student intake assessments for the program and select students for participation according to established criteria.

- Identify initial helping process team members for each student.

- Find and assign tutors to provide extra learning assistance to the students.

- Serve (at least initially) as the main broker for outside services and supervise communication and collaboration with outside participants.

- Oversee the general program effort in the school, encouraging creativity and dealing participatively with internal problems.

- Serve as site liaison with the program administrator and task force and implement any revisions in policies or practices.

- Supervise or conduct all necessary record keeping.

- Conduct formative evaluations of the program in the school and make necessary midcourse adjustments, reporting any major problems to the program administrator.

- Implement summative data collection efforts prescribed by the program administrator.

- Do, in general, whatever is necessary to optimize the program's effects in the school.

In addition, you may need to participate in selection of **instructors** who will participate in the program. Positive qualities in teachers for such roles are those who—

- view curriculum as a means to an end rather than an end in itself;
- are open to restructuring traditional curriculum concepts to relevancy-based, applied learning activities;
- are flexible and innovative in their instructional approaches and are open to new ideas;
- work well with other faculty and staff as team members;
- will function as positive role models;
- are willing to take on the added responsibility and commitment of occasional personal time needed in working effectively with at-risk students;
- show acceptance of variety in student types and lifestyles and who will not therefore judge students who adopt unusual modes of dress or speech that are common among many at-risk students; and
- are blessed with a sense of humor.

Finally, the needs of your program may require you to retrain and/or increase the number of school counselors, implement a comprehensive in-school health and family planning program, provide infant care facilities in the school for teenage mothers, and so forth. You will therefore need to allocate monies for salaries, retraining, facilities, equipment, and the like. The decisions you make in the two steps, "reorganizing school structures" and "providing inservice," will affect what you will need to allocate. Another section, "managing the program budget" will also help you develop the initial budget to underwrite these and other allocations.

Reorganize School Structures

Depending on the model you have developed or adopted, you will almost certainly need to restructure some school programs, policies, or curricula to meet the nontraditional needs of potential or recent dropouts. The following are some options that you may want to put into practice:

- **Set up an alternative school in a separate facility.** This is a critical element of Atlanta's Cities in Schools model, which created a separate school, Rich's Academy, for at-risk students from throughout the district. This approach allows a school to deliver many unique features, including nontraditional curricula and instructional methods, more individual attention to students, flexible class hours, a less restrictive environment, and a separate school identity that avoids what at-risk students perceive as the failure-laden context of traditional schools.

- **Set up a "school within a school."** In effect, this sets up an alternative school within an existing school environment and delivers many of its advantages. It is an economical compromise between having a separate facility and trying to serve at-risk students in a traditional context.

- **Expand in-school services** to include such services as infant care for teenage mothers, school-based health clinics, small and large group counseling, substance abuse counseling, and the like.

- **Revise policies about class size** for at-risk students. Class size for these students must remain smaller than the norm, much as for learning disabled or developmentally handicapped groups. Major learning discrepancies characterize all of these students, and at-risk youth are frequently resistant to instruction. An effective dropout prevention program will provide a larger ratio of teachers to students to ensure that at-risk youth receive the extra attention and support they need to learn and succeed in school.

- **Bring in new curricula or revise existing ones** in a traditional school setting to provide better basic skills instruction. For example, curricula could be modified so that basic skills, such as are nurtured by all faculty involved in the program, regardless of content area.

- **Integrate more electives, such as vocational instruction,** into at-risk students' curricula (perhaps in earlier grades) and offer learning experiences more directly related to "the real world" in all classes the students take. Paragraph writing, for example, has little relevance for at-risk students, but completing job applications does.

- **Incorporate experiential, cooperative education, or other work-study experiences** into at-risk students' curricula. Instruction should deliberately emphasize how basic and vocational skills relate directly to the job and work world, or the advantage of the work-study connection will be lost.

- **Support students who want or need to work,** even if the program cannot provide work-study placements. Such support may include helping the student find good part-time placement, working with employers to arrange school schedules and other support for education, encouraging employers to become involved in the student's helping process team, and so forth. Your dropout program must recognize that earning income is critical to many at-risk students or dropouts, and it can not hope to help these students complete their education without dealing supportively with students' need or desire to work.

- **Develop and encourage the use of instructional approaches that reorganize curricular structure and reformulate content learning** based on learning strategies (e.g., use of computer-assisted instruction, use of late adolescent or adult interest themes in instruction, use of lower reading levels, frequent use of audio-visuals) that have proven successful with reluctant learners. This has been a crucial component in most effective dropout prevention programs.

- **Develop a system of academic incentives and rewards to encourage reluctant learners and/or occasional attenders to begin to perform successfully and consistently.** Many successful dropout prevention programs award value for work effort and consistent performance in the form of points earned toward a grade or other incentive.

- **Revise scheduling policies** to give students (especially working students and teenage parents) greater flexibility in scheduling classes and to support the retention of what they learn. For example, a cooperative education component means that half a day will go into employment, so classroom instruction will have to be compressed into the remaining half-day schedule. Other flexible scheduling options include offering evening or weekend classes and extending classes through the summer.

- **Restructure your truancy office** to provide better detection of absentee patterns and more progressive attendance assistance to at-risk students and/or dropouts. (See the "Truant Officer/ Attendance Aide" section of *The Helping Process Booklet for Team Members* for details.)

- **Identify a school faculty or staff person as the central liaison and information resource on collaborating agencies and organizations,** at least until your program coordinators are familiar with them.

- **Establish clear paths of communication** so that everyone knows whom to contact about what and messages and concerns can easily and quickly reach the concerned parties.

- **Provide released time for school faculty and staff** to attend program inservice events, attend helping process team meetings, accompany at-risk students to outside agencies, and perform other specific program tasks outside their usual school assignments.

- **Revise participating staff and faculty's job descriptions to include their dropout prevention program duties.** Wherever possible, these duties should not be added to the school personnel's existing responsibilities, and they should not be expected to do all of the extra work "out of hide." This is particularly important for program coordinators.

Manage the Program Budget

Once you've determined what staff, facilities, and resources will be needed to develop and operate your dropout prevention program, you'll resume your more usual administrative role of budgetary allocator. The budget you propose must adequately support the program's needs. These should include the following:

- **Developmental costs** for construction or renovation of facilities; curriculum development or revision; inservice for participants (professional and volunteer); equipment purchases and/or repairs; purchase of texts, software, and consumable supplies; telephone installations; and so forth.

- **Operational costs** to run the program, such as staff salaries; release time for instructors and other school staff; equipment repair; purchase of additional texts, software, and consumable supplies; transportation for students to alternative schools or cooperative jobs or the like (as needed); inservice costs (as needed); program evaluation costs; heating, lighting, telephone, and maintenance estimates if a separate facility is needed; and so forth.

No program can hope to be successful without strong administrative support for funding. However, many programs have augmented their program's operating budget by obtaining grants from federal, state, and foundation sources. You may also want to approach local employers, labor unions, and service and social organizations for donations of equipment, facilities, supplies, funds, and or volunteers. These kinds of extra resources are especially important for starting up a program and for expanding or refining it once it's up and running.

Provide Inservice

When a program begins or whenever a significant change in a program occurs, it is vital to give all participants an orientation to the program (or modifications) and provide them with the knowledge and skills they will need to make the program work. Here are some suggestions for providing orientation and/or staff development to program participants:

- **Organize an orientation for the coordinators of the program** at each site when the dropout prevention program is first introduced. This should not only include your program coordinators at the schools, but also those persons in community agencies and organizations who are assigned the responsibility of coordinating their services with the program. Once these participants have a solid grasp of the program model, objectives, helping process, and so forth, they can in turn offer inservice orientation to other participating professionals and volunteers at their site.

- **Provide inservice training** for specific program processes. This includes using the helping process, participating effectively on a team, tutoring effectively (necessary for volunteer tutors), mentoring, and other kinds of support or services that may call for the participants to use knowledge or skills they may not already have or that need sharpening.

- **Organize an annual event (inservice, meeting, luncheon, and so forth) for all adult participants** (perhaps by school or site) to bring them up to date on the success of the program in the past year, any revisions to the model or procedures, and so forth. This is also a good time to orient new participants and to recognize outstanding contributions of participants from the year before. An unspoken purpose for such annual meetings should be to revitalize the participants' interest and motivation, so provide a catered luncheon or dinner, if possible, to both reward them and spark their sense of mission.

Encourage Flexibility and Creativity

Because the needs of at-risk students are so diverse and seldom remain static, adults on "the front lines" of a dropout prevention program have a particular need for creativity, flexibility, and commitment. Efforts like these demand support from the top. Your recognition and reinforcement of these qualities will set the parameters for the people who work directly with the students.

Here are suggestions for encouraging these qualities:

- **State clearly your belief in the importance of these qualities in making the dropout prevention program and the helping process work.** It should appear as a statement or theme in the procedures manual, in orientations and inservices, and in all of your communications and interactions with program faculty and staff.

- **Model these qualities at every opportunity.** This means taking a "let's see what we can do" and "let's try something new" approach to the development and refinement of school structures, policies, and services involved in the program. Clearly there will be limits on innovation and flexibility, but a "let's try it" attitude will define those limits operationally and with more credibility than simple mandates from the top.

- **Scan the dropout literature for new insights or ideas** that your program can adopt or adapt to do a better job of helping at-risk students. Present these ideas to your task force and/or program coordinators to help keep their creative juices flowing.

- **Expect your program to grow and change** to meet students' changing needs, and share this expectation with other participants. It is important that all see the program as a dynamic creation, rather than a fixed one. At least once a year, you and the task force (with input from the program coordinators) should review the program structure, policies, and approaches in order to made modifications that build on the strengths and minimize or eliminate the weaknesses.

Evaluate the Program

Because a dropout prevention program often exceeds the cost of other educational programs serving a similar number of students, you will need to evaluate its contribution and effectiveness in order to justify its continuation. In addition, you'll want to gather data on its progress so the model and procedures can be fine-tuned to meet changing student needs.

As the program administrator, you probably do not need to concern yourself with the details of formative evaluation. This kind of evaluation, which takes place during program operation, is actually a way for the people who are actually implementing the program—the program coordinators, primarily—to sense how well things are going so they can make midcourse adjustments. Usually these adjustments are relatively minor. If major problems arise with the basic structure or coordination of the program model or procedures, the program coordinators have the responsibility to report that to you immediately. Otherwise, you need not concern yourself with formative evaluation other than to spot-check with the coordinators to detect any general patterns of problems.

Summative evaluation—the determination of overall program impact—is primarily your responsibility as program administrator. This is usually done annually, following the end of the school year. If a formal needs assessment was developed to define the scope of the dropout problem, then the summative evaluation instrument can be a simple outgrowth of the assessment format. Data may be drawn from achievement tests, grade cards, graduation data, follow-up surveys, and so forth. Regardless of the methods or sources you use, you will probably want to determine at least the following **summative information**:

- How many seniors in the dropout prevention program successfully completed their diplomas or G.E.D.s
- How the grade averages of the graduating students in the program compare to the averages of other graduating students, both at-risk and not at risk
- How many of the graduating students in the program found job placements (and what kinds, at what income levels) as compared to those of other graduating students, both at-risk and not at risk
- How many junior or younger students in the program successfully completed the year without dropping out of school
- How the grade averages of the retained junior or younger students in the program compare to the averages of other students completing those grades, both at-risk and not at risk

- How the program affected less measurable student outcomes, such as growth in student self-esteem, career ambitions, ambitions for postsecondary education, and so forth

- How many students enrolled in the program dropped out anyway, and why

- How many students in the program participated in which kinds of educational and noneducational activities or services provided by the program

These are only a few of the kinds of questions a summative evaluation may ask. You may want to focus extra attention on special subgroups in the program, such as pregnant teens, teenage parents, and students with English as a second language.

Though summative data's major purpose is usually to justify continuance of the program and its funding, the data also provide the basis for program refinement, modification, and/or expansion. Once summative data are collected, they should be analyzed and summarized in a report to be shared with the superintendent of schools, the board of education, the dropout prevention program task force, and—if appropriate—the community (usually through the media).

Review Evaluation Findings with the Task Force

Following the conclusion of each school year of the program, you should report the summative evaluation findings to the program task force. It is your mutual responsibility to examine the program outcomes and decide what changes may need to be made in the program objectives, model, and/or procedures.

Clearly, if the findings show that your program did not attain the retention rates you envisioned in your objectives, there are weaknesses in your model or procedures that must be ferreted out and revised. If, on the other hand, your findings exceed your expectations, you may want to determine what components contribute most strongly to these benefits and build on those components to extend your outreach and successes even more.

Be aware, however, that no model or set of procedures can remain fixed, no matter how successful, because student needs also change over time. You will probably find yourself and the task force members working hard every year to accommodate shifting program needs through revisions and additions to the model or procedures. Your dropout prevention program, like any educational endeavor, will always be changing to keep pace with the times.

DROPOUT PREVENTION SERIES

THE HELPING PROCESS

Targeted at the various individuals who have roles to play in a successful student retention effort, this series of six booklets and videocassette delineates the activities necessary to create a supportive team of adults to help students gain a diploma, job-entry skills, and options for further education. The Professional Set includes a single copy of each of the booklets and the videocassette.

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ADMINISTRATOR MATERIALS

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